

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
80R9973 EJI-F

S.B. 1440  
By: Hegar  
S/C on Ag., Rural Affairs & Coastal Resources  
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As Filed

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Recruitment and retention of individuals for volunteer fire departments is an ongoing challenge that poses a public safety issue in areas all across rural Texas. Pineywoods Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) applied for and received funding through a U.S. Department of Homeland Security SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant to work at a regional level with four other RC&Ds to assist fire departments in rural areas of East Texas with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. The regional grant will offer 308 volunteer fire departments the opportunity to become better informed and trained on this important topic. Another problem facing rural areas is that they have higher Insurance Service Organization (ISO) ratings, which result in higher premiums for many rural homeowners.

As proposed, S.B. 1440 requires the Office of Rural Community Affairs (office) to work with interested persons to assist volunteer fire departments by providing information and identifying practices and techniques that have been proven successful in other departments. The bill also authorizes the office to provide rural homeowners with information relating to the benefits of volunteer fire departments, including a reduction in homeowner insurance risk ratings, lower homeowners insurance rates, and better fire protection.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to any state officer, institution, or agency.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amend Section 487.051, Government Code, as follows:

Sec. 487.051. POWERS AND DUTIES. Requires the Office of Rural Community Affairs to work with interested persons to assist volunteer fire departments and emergency services districts in rural areas.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 487.060, Government Code, as added by Chapter 634, Acts of the 79th Legislature, Regular Session, 2005, as follows:

Sec. 487.060. EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT PROGRAM. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text.

(b) Authorizes the program under this section to assist fire departments in rural areas with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, provide to fire departments in rural areas information relating to assistance programs offered to rural volunteer firefighters, including the federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant program to help fire departments increase staffing and deployment capabilities, and provide to rural homeowners information relating to the benefits of volunteer fire departments, including a reduction in homeowners insurance risk ratings, lower homeowners insurance rates, and better fire protection.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2007.